

THE LATE PERCIVAL R. H. ST. JOHN

Percy St. John, who died on August 12, was born in Melbourne on May 11, 1872. His father was a taxidermist in Bourke Street and supplied zoological specimens to the museums of Europe.

Incredible as it now seems to me, it was from up in a tree in the Botanic Gardens that I first faced him. I was the culprit in search of the eggs of the tree sparrow, an uncommon bird forty years ago, when I was a fledgling of eight years. As the years drew on there has been a certain parallelism in our careers and I have known him in play and work, and deeply regret his death.

It is recorded in the Victorian Government Gazette that P. R. H. St. John commenced duties in the Botanic Gardens at the tender age of eleven years—July, 1883. He was apprenticed to sign- and label-writing, in which he became famous. Even as a child his love of natural history made itself apparent, and his parentage and position in the Gardens tended to foster this taste. He grew up in an atmosphere charged with the very science he was to do so much to advance.

Few Victorians ever have known, or ever will know, the names of plants as he did. Side by side with his self-education in botany, he became an artist skilled in black-and-white and water-colour. He was expert in the determination of birds and a skilled mimic of their calls. He had developed an uncanny sense of direction and was expert in bushcraft. As a youth he supplemented his meagre salary by collecting for the benevolent Baron von Mueller, who paid him for dried specimens and seeds collected on his various botanical explorations. With the Melbourne Walkers' Club he travelled thousands of miles, even as far as Cape Everard.

He specialized in horticulture, native plants, and their economic value to the public. With the late Dr. Heber Green he did valuable researches on Eucalyptus and other essential oils; with Mr. Russell Grimwade he studied the species most suitable for garden planting. In 1910, in company with J. W. Audas, he made a botanical survey of Wilson's Promontory. Articles appearing in this journal during the years 1910 and 1911 were the outcome of his researches, whilst the material is set aside in the National Herbarium as a special collection.

He joined the Field Naturalists' Club in 1908 and became President in 1929-1930. Here he will be remembered for his artistic arrangement of the special native collections staged by the Botanic Gardens at our flower shows. Under the direction of the late J. Cronin, he greatly increased the extent of the Australian border at the Botanic Gardens. He was promoted to the position of Head Gardener in July, 1917, and later became Classifier and was in charge of the Economic Museum. After an extension of service he retired in 1938, thus concluding a faithful public career of 55 years.

The cumulative result of his knowledge, which he was ever ready to pass on, though quiet, was far-reaching and deep. P. F. MORRIS.

EXHIBITS AT AUGUST MEETING

Mrs. C. French: Bunch of native flowers (8 spp.) garden-grown at Canterbury.

Mrs. J. J. Frean: Marine specimens, and corn-wing showing the claw.

Mr. Tom Griffiths: Books of pressed ferns, including *Dryopteris chepheredii*, *Polystichum adiantiforme*, *Doodia caudata*, *D. media*, *Asplenium obtusatum* and many others.

Mr. Ivo C. Hammet: Garden-grown native flowers.

Mr. H. T. Reeves: Coloured photographs of native flowers.